



Al-Risala 1992

May

The Example of the Universe

According to Emerson, nature works on the principle of all for one and one for all. This is a succinct but correct description of the functioning of the universe, in which there are innumerable objects, all moving in perfect coordination with each other. Each acts in a manner which complements the actions of the others and is in complete harmony with the whole.

In this, an example for man has been set by the Creator of the Universe which he is obliged to follow. That is to say that man is expected to conduct himself on the same pattern in society, working harmony with others and for the benefit of all. Conversely, humanity as a whole should function in such a manner as to contribute to the progress and success of the individual. In short, the functioning of the individual should be in consonance with that of the community and vice versa.

The Universe, in the form set up by its Creator, is a living example of how the individual should behave and how, too, he should not behave. It shows which type of man will be exalted in the eyes of the Creator and which type will stand rejected.

Let us take the example of a tree and its relationship with the universe. In the latter, heat, gravity, air and water are ever present and each of these exists in exact accordance with the requirements of the plant. Right from the humble bacteria to the mighty sun, all things are, so to speak, spread out in the universe like a banquet for living things to feed on; all of these things provide those very elements which the tree by its very nature stands in need.

Moreover, the tree lives and grows in this world without coming into conflict with anything. Its wood, its leaves, its flowers, its fruits, its sap, in fact, its entire produce is useful to the rest of the world. One of its most important functions in this modern age of pollution is its inhalation of carbon dioxide and its exhalation of oxygen. A similar symbiotic relationship between a part and the whole, that is between the individual and society, is a most urgent necessity if humanity is not to bring about its own destruction.

Rejection and Acceptance

Commenting on the importance still attached to caste and religion, the *Times of India* of October 28, 1990 recalled the incident of an Indian boy who, in 1965, went to a government college for admission. He was given an application form which had columns for religion and caste. He left “those spaces blank. His application was turned down by the clerk on the grounds that it was incomplete.”

The application was rejected on purely technical grounds. In reality there was no good reason for its rejection. What is worse is that such rejections are a common occurrence. Every day, individuals in all walks of life find themselves turned down for jobs and places in colleges just because they do not measure up to certain man-made standards. Such cases of rejection in this world are not based on proper grounds but on standards which have been artificially conceived. Quite often, this is true of acceptances also.

In this world, imperfect conditions seem to prevail everywhere. This is against God’s plan of creation, but He tolerates it because this world is a testing ground for mankind. The moment the time predetermined by God is over He will change the entire scene. What will follow will be His court, where he will give His judgment based on the facts.

The way people are rejected or accepted here will be repeated in the Hereafter. The difference, however, will be that whereas today’s verdicts are given on the basis of unreal standards, in the Hereafter the decrees issued will be based on the standard laid down by God.

5 May 1992

One who lies low in this world will be raised up on high in the Hereafter

Ali said, "Lay low so that you do not attract attention; and be silent so that you remain safe."

(Ibn Abi Ad-Duniya)

Four Steps to Modernity

In Islam, man has found true, unadulterated religion, in the sense that it has swept away all the artificial barriers between God and man for ever. Islam's sacred scriptures, the Qur'an and the Sunnah rise up like mighty towers to shed their light of guidance upon mankind for all eternity.

The Qur'an at various points stresses the fact that the religion sent by God to mankind in the shape of Islam is not only a source of guidance in the religious sense but is also a blessing in many other ways (6:157). One very important way in which it was blessing was that it brought human history out of the age of darkness and caused it to enter into the age of light. This was a revolution in thought which unlocked the doors to innumerable worldly benefits. It is this second, worldly, aspect of the Islamic revolution which the well-known western historian, Henri Pirenne, describes as Islam having "changed the face of the globe. The traditional order of history was overthrown." (*History of Western Europe*, p. 46.)

The present era, which we think of as modern and advanced, the age of science and industry, of freedom and equality – is a direct consequence of this aspect of the Islamic revolution which is called a blessing in the Qur'an. This period, like most other major historical developments, came about gradually taking almost a thousand years to reach its culmination.

This gradual process may be broadly divided into four stages, the first three of which are directly connected with the Islamic revolution. The fourth stage is indirectly related.

1. The period of the Prophet, 610-632.
2. The period of the Pious Caliphs, 632-661.
3. The period of Umayyads and Abbasids, 661-1492 (including Spain)
4. The modern revolution brought about in Europe which started in the 15th century after the crusades under the influence of Muslim civilization.

Till the beginning of the present century, it had been generally understood in the civilized world that the secret of progress was simply to lead man from the traditional to the modern. But, having reached his destination, man has again fallen prey to frustration. His feeling now is that to achieve real progress, man needs to have a more profound philosophical base from which to launch himself. Various articles on this issue have recently been published under such headings as 'Shallow are the Roots', etc.

Now, writers in the western world are taking up this issue. One of the more prominent is William E. Connolly who authored *Political Theory and Modernity*. (published by Blackwell, London)

Professor Connolly writes:

“The whole project of modernity, despite its stunning success, is highly problematic. This is because all attempts to fill the place which God was forced to vacate at the start of the project – with reason, with the general will, the dialectic of history – have been of no avail, and each has ended up in one kind of nihilism or another.”

Before the advent of Islam, the world was in the grip of polytheism. Men’s minds were ruled by polytheistic thoughts. The creature had taken the place of the Creator. Man worshipped innumerable gods. As a result, his whole way of thinking had gone awry, and the door to all progress remained locked.

Then Islam came to the world. Its main objective was to put an end to polytheism and to give monotheism the place of predominance. After great sacrifice on the part of the Prophet and his companions, polytheism was, indeed displaced for ever, giving monotheism the ascendancy. The effect of this revolution was so far-reaching, that monotheism remained in full force for almost a thousand years. Then came the emergence of modern industrial civilization. This civilization initially came into being in western Europe under the influence of the Islamic revolution. Its influence later spread all over the world. The negative aspect of this civilization is its emphasis on materialism to the exclusion of all else. Its positive aspect is its continuation of the effect of the Islamic revolution in emancipating human thought.

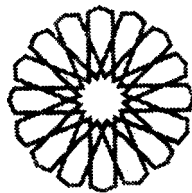
An Unrewarded Success

On the Atlantic shores of South America, Brazil, one of the continent's largest countries, with a predominantly Catholic population of 119 million, was under military rule from 1964 to 1985. During this period a democratic movement was launched against military rule, one of the most distinguished politicians to come to the fore being Tancred Neves. It took twenty one years of arduous struggle before he managed to succeed in rallying the people against the military junta, whose leaders were finally forced to call for general elections. These took place in 1985. Mr. Neves, who had himself suffered great hardships, was elected President with an overwhelming majority. The media lauded his great victory, and one newspaper summed it up by saying, "His victory capped a political career spanning nearly 50 years."

The oath-taking ceremony of Mr. Neves was to take place on March 15, 1985 in the Presidential palace. However, on that very day, hours before the function, he fell ill. He was immediately taken to one of the country's best hospitals where he was kept for a month under the observation of foreign specialists. He underwent seven operations during this period, but all these efforts to save him were of no avail. Mr. Neves died on 21 April 1985 at the age of 75.

How bewildering is man's ultimate fate. He spares no effort to reach his goals, but does not receive the fruits of his labour. A crown of victory is prepared for him, but it will never adorn his head. The completion of his labours signals the beginning of his destruction.

Such instances make it clear that the present world is only a place for action. It is not necessarily a place for receiving rewards. That place – the place of final reckoning – is elsewhere, far beyond this mundane world.



Misunderstanding

One night Aisha found that the Prophet was missing from the house, and immediately came to the conclusion that he had gone to one of his other wives. She went in search of him, and found him in the mosque in the posture of *ruku* (bowed in prayer, with his hands on his knees) and he was repeating the words. "O Allah, you are pure, all praise to you, there is no God but you." Then Aisha said to him.

What different states of mind we are in. I in a worldly state of mind, and you in an unworldly.

When Aisha could not find the Prophet at home, she assumed that he had gone to another wife, while, in actuality, he had gone to the house of God. She imagined him remembering one of his other wives while, in fact, he had remembered the Almighty. In the same way any man may make guesses about his fellow men which are based on the obvious. At a first glance, he thinks he is right. But after probing, he finds that his initial information was inadequate and his conclusion was just guesswork. His assumptions were very far from the reality.

There could be misunderstandings even in the case of a Companion. The common man would, therefore, be even more prone to place wrong constructions on other's actions. It is certainly necessary to investigate misunderstandings, whatever their nature. One should never rely entirely on opinion without being in possession of all of the relevant facts.

It is a sin not to make proper investigations. No excuse in this regard will be acceptable to God. Anyone who forms an opinion about a servant of God without having fully informed himself about the latter's character and actions shall have to answer for his sins to the Almighty.

9 May 1992

The cure for anger is silence

Abdullah ibn Abbas records the Prophet as saying: "When anyone of you becomes angry, he should remain silent." This the Prophet repeated three times.

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)

The Law of Guidance

A tradition has been recorded in the *Sahih*¹ of Al-Bukhari (Kitabul Tafseer)² with reference to the surah entitled *Al-Qasas* (The Narrative), according to which the Prophet went to his uncle, Abu Talib, when the latter was on his deathbed. Abu Jahal and Abdullah ibn Umayya ibn Mughira, both implacable enemies of the Prophet, were already present when he arrived. The Prophet said, "O uncle, just say there is no God but Allah, so that I may plead for you before the Almighty."

Note:

1. The title of the first of the *Kutubus-Sittah*, or "Six correct" books of traditions received by the Sunnis. It was compiled by Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Ismail al Bukhari, who was born at Bukharah. A.H. 194 and died at Khanang, near Samarkand, A.H. 256. It contains 9,882 traditions of which 2,623 are held to be of undisputed authority. They are arranged into 160 books and 3,450 chapters,

2. Commentary on the Qur'an.

Before he could reply, Abu Jahal and Abdullah ibn Umayya both asked Abu Talib if he would forsake the religion of Abdul Muttalib, i.e. that of his own father. The Prophet repeatedly urged Abu Talib to accept Islam, but Abu Jahal and Abdulah ibn Umayya also posed the same question over and over again' until Abu Talib ultimately said he would continue to adhere to the religion of Abdul Muttalib. And he refused to utter the basic creed, '*La Ilaha Illallah*' (There is no god but the one God).

According to a tradition, when Allah revealed the verse in the Qur'an about Abu Talib, he addressed the Prophet thus: "You cannot guide whom you please. It is Allah who guides whom He will. He best knows those who yield to guidance." (28:56).

This shows how the law of God operates for the guidance of his servants. This law tells us that no matter with what force of logic one is approached to accept Islam, the situation will always be vitiated by an element of doubt. No amount of reasoning will improve matters. Not even the Prophet's personality or his superior logic had the desired effect.

It is for the invitee to raise the curtain of doubt, and not for the one who invites. This is the Sunnah of Allah and Allah's Sunnah never changes. It is entirely the responsibility of the potential believer to lift the curtain of doubt and to see the reality unveiled. He who passes this test, i.e. who removes the curtain of doubt, will receive divine guidance in accordance with God's law. He who fails to do so will be denied divine guidance.

Through the Prophet, this message of Islam had been fully conveyed to Abu Talib. But he still had his doubts. Who was really right? His nephew and son of Abdullah, or the rest of the leaders of the community, including Abdul Muttalib? Abu Talib failed to push aside the curtain of doubt and so lost his opportunity to receive God's guidance.

There is a tradition that says that Paradise is divine merchandise, and very costly at that. Anyone who wants to possess it must 'spare himself no expense. And what is this very high price that the aspirant has to pay. He has to overcome the element of doubt, tear asunder the veil over reality. Once he has accomplished this very delicate task, he is entitled to divine guidance in this world and to paradise in the hereafter.

Paradise is the abode of such fine and pure souls as can ignore, the obviously grandiose in their search for hidden, divine greatness, as can recognize true merit, as can leave behind this noisy existence for the world of silence; as can go beneath the surface to see, not appearances, but the truth, as can rise above the glories of *akabir* to discover the truth.

Paradise is for the human being with vision. It is not for the blind. It is for those who can see reality, and not for those who can see only appearances. It is for the discoverers and not for blind adherents. It is for the divine souls who will surely pass through its portals.

11 May 1992

It is a wise man who fears God

“Wisdom comes from fear of God,” said Abdullah ibn Masud. Commenting on the verse of the Quran, “He grants wisdom unto whom He will,” Abul Aliyah said that here wisdom meant fear of God, for true wisdom could come only from fear of God.”

(Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*)

The Compensation for Zero Power

The difference between God and man is not one of greater or less power. It is one of omnipotence and no power at all. God is all-powerful while man is quite powerless. One might ask what justification there could be for creating a situation in which man has not been invested with even one iota of power. Why was it legitimate for God to have created a being who was totally helpless, deriving power neither from within himself nor from anything in the outside world?

The only valid answer to this question will be one which offers man full compensation for his helplessness. Nothing short of total redressal can be the answer. This means that the answer must go as deep as the question, i.e. it must offer the key to transforming man's helplessness into some form of recompense.

Such an answer is to be found explicitly spelt out in the Qur'an and the hadith. It lies in God's special blessing which makes it possible for a man to secure something by the mere asking for it. If a man seeks something from God, he will certainly become a receiver. When man does not possess power of his own, he will have it only by receiving it from God. This is something which God is ever ready to grant him. True prayer in this sense guarantees compensation for his helplessness, for if it is made in all sincerity; it is bound to be accepted by the Almighty.

This is expressed in a Hadith in terms of the sincere prayer never going unfulfilled. That is, if a man calls on his Creator in earnest, his prayer is never rejected. The Prophet Jesus Christ made the same assertion:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a serpent? It ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew, 7:7-11).

The Way of the Companions

The Qur'an refers to Mariam (Mary) as the sister of Haroun. There are many traditions which make reference to this relationship. One of them is also follows:

Kaab said in the presence of Ayesha, the Prophet's wife, that Mariam was not the sister of Haroun, the brother of Musa. Ayesha said that this was a lie. He replied, "O Mother of the Faithful, if the Messenger of Allah had said so, I would have conceded this point, for he was the most truthful and knowledgeable among us. As it is, I find a difference of six hundred years between Mariam and Haroun."

Al-Qurtubi, 11/100)

There is food for thought in this incident. On the one hand there is Ayesha, harshly criticizing a highly respectable companion, and on the other hand there is the companion, not losing his composure over either her criticism or the harshness of her language. Instead, he merely tells her that whatever he says is a matter of history and that if she can prove him wrong by stronger evidence (like a saying of the Prophet) he will accept this; Ayesha gives in to the weight of his argument and falls silent. (There is a saying of the Prophet which supports Kaab's stand, but perhaps it was not known to either of them at that time.)

Criticism was commonplace in the early stages of Islam, but no one seemed to be discomfited by it, even if it was couched in harsh language. If criticized, people did not become angry: they simply wanted to know the truth. That is how they lived such virtuous lives. If we were to adopt their ways We too would be able to live, in virtue, even when surrounded by the depravity of our times.

13 May 1992

One who lives receives

“Every day, two angels visit the servants of God on earth. One of them prays: “Lord, reward those who spend,” while the other prays, “Lord, destroy the wealth of those who withhold.”

(Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

An Imaginary Threat

An inhabitant of Mecca by the name of Al Haris Bin Usman was once invited to enter the fold of Islam by the Prophet. In those ancient times, before the name of the Prophet had become legendary, Al Haris bin Usman was afraid of the consequences if he acceded to the Prophet's request. I know what you say is undoubtedly true. But if I become your follower, I am afraid I'll be thrown out of Mecca by the Arabs." The Qur'an mentions this fear in the 57th verse of the 28th chapter: "They say: 'If we accept the guidance with you, we shall be driven from our land.'"

The threat hanging over potential converts was very material in origin. Many idols belonging to different tribes were kept in the Ka'aba, and the Meccan leadership not only gained in importance because of their presence there, but also sustained itself largely on the offerings made to these idols by the tribesmen. When the Prophet conveyed God's message, acceptance of which would have meant destroying these idols, the Meccans may have accepted the logic of what he said in their inner minds, but practical considerations stood in the way of their openly accepting it. If they had agreed that there was only one God and that all other gods were false, they would have been ostracized by the rest of the tribes, and would have thus been deprived of both leadership and livelihood.

A somewhat similar situation exists among Indian Muslims today. When Quranic facts are presented to them, they at once recognise their veracity. But they are, at the same time plagued with doubts. If they show forbearance, the Hindus will become emboldened. If they do not start political agitation, they will lose their importance. If they stop making demands and creating unrest, they will lose whatever constitutional rights they are at present enjoying. And so on and so forth.

These doubts are nothing but Satan's creations in Muslim minds. There is no truth in them whatsoever.

Something to Ponder Over

When the Prophet of Islam brought to the world the message of God's uniqueness, a number of people turned against him, alleging that he was insane. Concerning this, the Qur'an says: 'I exhort you to one thing: stand up before God in pairs or singly and ponder whether your compatriot is truly insane. He is sent forth to warn you against a dreadful scourge.' (34:46-47)

That made it clear that there was no good reason to deny the Prophet. Such allegations were the result of his detractor's obstinacy and prejudice. Had they set aside these feelings and thought about this, individually or collectively, they would have realized their mistake. If they had really had open minds, they would have known that the man whom they had labeled insane was certainly not so. He was the true messenger of God.

The past life of the Prophet bore witness to the seriousness of his mission. The soulfulness and sincerity of his discourses testified to the truth of what he said. The living wisdom of his words bears witness to this. If he did not want any recompense from anyone, that in itself was a proof that whatever he did was for the sake of Allah, and not for any material gain.

Viewed impartially, the agitation of the inviter to Islam was not because of insanity but because he saw the impending disaster about to overtake his hearers, and against which he warned them.

To the serious-minded these facts should prove a revelation. Having taken account of them, they will recognize the bonafide inviter to Islam, and will not hesitate to follow him. On the other hand, those who are not serious about the message he brings will not see the reality, no matter how glaring it may be.

15 May 1992

One does not lose by giving

Abu Hurayrah reports this saying of the Prophet: "Charity does not decrease anyone's wealth while forgiveness only increases a man's honour; God raises up one who abases himself before his Lord,"

(Muslim, *Sahih*)

A Comparison

In 1919, the All India Congress held its annual meeting in Amritsar. Many years later, in 1973, I had the opportunity to hear about the highlights of this meeting from one of the participants, Principal Niranjan Singh and brother of Master Tara Singh. The details of this discussion were published in *Ajmiat Weekly* (August 31, 1973) a part of which is reproduced here.

Among the noted leaders were Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak. MotiLal Nehru and Annie Besant. Even Mahatma Gandhi was present there. But he looked so insignificant that when the schoolboys saw him sitting on the stage, they shouted, "who is this grass cutter?"

Tilak proposed a resolution for complete freedom. The second proposal came from Gandhiji. He had proposed Dominion Status. After both the leaders had concluded their speeches, a vote was cast. Gandhiji got 127 votes against 123 of Tilak. Gandhiji's proposal was accepted.

Mr. Singh said that Gandhi's victory over Tilak was surprising indeed. When the result was announced the students started shouting "The grass cutter has won! The grass cutter has won!"

Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak had a revolutionary bent of mind. He always spoke in a thunderous voice whereas Gandhiji was coolheaded and spoke in a low tone. Tilak and the Muslim leaders wanted to demand complete freedom straightaway, whereas Gandhiji wanted it in stages, keeping in view the prevailing conditions. In the beginning, leaders like Tilak looked very lofty compared to the diminutive Gandhi. But when history gave its verdict, the world saw Gandhi as the front rank leader, while Tilak and the others brought up the rear.

16 May 1992

The right of others to one's property

According to Jaadah, the Prophet, on seeing an extremely fat man, laid his finger on the man's stomach and said: "If what is in excess there lay in someone else's stomach, you would be the better for it."

(Al-Tabarani)

Going Against One's Conscience

Arnold Toynbee, the renowned British historian (1889-1975) once said during the last days of his life that the staking of the claim by the Jews to Palestine as their historical homeland was like the Red Indian tribes asking for the return of Canada. The Jews have written innumerable books against the atrocities perpetuated by the Nazis, but the barbarous treatment meted out by the Jews to the Palestine Arabs is of the same nature as that meted out by the Nazis to the Jews.

This statement was made by Toynbee in Canada when Herzog was the Israeli ambassador to that country. Herzog invited Toynbee to a discussion with him on this subject after which a function was held at the Mc Gill University in which both took part. On this occasion, Herzog stated that the German Nazis had killed 600,000 Jews, whereas the number of Arabs made homeless in Palestine was negligible in comparison. He asked how both of these events could be treated on a par.

In his answer, Arnold Toynbee said that what he had meant to highlight by comparing the atrocities committed by the Nazis on the one hand and the Jews on the other was not the actual death toll, but the nature of the crime. One does not have to commit hundreds of murders to be branded a murderer. A single murder is enough. "I wonder why my words so offend you? I have said just what your own consciences are saying."

The voice of one's heart is unfailing in speaking the truth, so that when one rejects the truth one, in reality, rejects one's own self. What causes an individual to do so? It is mainly stubbornness and partiality, and the desire always to appear right, even when in the wrong. Whenever a man utters such false words, his own heart bears witness to their hollowness.

The greatest wrong that a man can do is turn a deaf ear to his Own conscience. This is like making oneself a witness to one's own criminality. How strange is this moral deprivation? But when a man's insensitivity becomes so extreme, he considers the outcome of this deprivation to be his victories. While morally, he is killing himself, he imagines that he is giving himself a new lease of life. Consider that when the voice of conscience is finally silenced, the soul, too, utters its last gasp.

Polygamy And Islam

In terms of the birth rate, men and women are almost equal in number. But subsequently, for a variety of reasons, the number of men in society decreases, leaving an excess of women. Now the question arises as to what should be the solution to this problem. In view of the inevitability of this imbalance, how is a healthy relationship between the sexes to be established?

The choice for us, therefore, is not between monogamy and polygamy but rather the lawful polygamy of Islam or the illicit polygamy of non-Islamic peoples.

One of the commandments given in the Qur'an as a matter of social organization concerns polygamy, that is permission for a man to marry up to four women:

If you fear that you cannot treat orphans with fairness, then you may marry such women (widowed) as seem good to you: two, three or four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice marry one only (4:3).

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud (Shawwal 3 AH) in which seventy Muslims were martyred. Suddenly, seventy homes in Medina were bereft of all male members, and the question now arose as to how all these widows and orphans were to be cared for. This was an acute social problem. It was solved by the revelation of this verse asking the people who could afford it to take care of the orphans, by marrying the widows and keeping their orphaned children under their guardianship.

The background and wording of this verse appear to express a commandment which should be only temporary in effect. That is to say that it applied only to a particular state of emergency when, due to losses of men in battle, the number of women exceeded the number of available men. But the Qur'an, despite its having been revealed at a particular time and place, is universal in its application. One of the great characteristics of the Qur'an is that it describes eternal realities, with reference to temporal issues, this commandment being typical of this special quality of the Qur'an.

One point greatly in need of clarification is that in the matter of marrying more than one woman, the initiative does not lie solely with any individual man. There is always the condition – an inescapable one – that whatever the society, the women should outnumber the men. Suppose the earth were inhabited by one thousand million people out of which 500 million were men and 500 million were women. It would not then be possible in such a situation for a man to have more than one wife. A second, third or fourth wife would be obtainable only by force. But in Islam, a forced marriage is not considered lawful. According to the *shari'ah* the willingness of the bride-to-be is a compulsory condition.

Looked at from a practical angle, the above commandment of the Qur'an can be complied with only if that particular situation exists in society which existed in Medina after the Battle of Uhud – that is, there is a disproportion in the ratio of men and women. In the absence of such a situation, this commandment

of the Qur'an would be inapplicable. But studies of human society and its history have shown that the situation in ancient Medina was not one which existed only at a particular point in time. It is a situation which had almost always been prevalent throughout the entire world. That situation of emergency is, in fact, the general situation of mankind. This commandment is yet another proof of God's omniscience. His commandment, seemingly elicited by an emergency, became an eternal commandment for the whole of our world.

THE INEQUALITY IN NUMBERS

Records show that male and female births are almost equal in number. But a study of mortality shows that the rate is higher for men than for women. This disparity is in evidence from early childhood to extreme old age. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1984): "In general, the risk of death at any given age is less for females than for males" (VII/37).

The proportionately higher numbers of women in society can be traced to a variety of causes. For instance, when war breaks out, the majority of the casualties are men. In the First World War (1914-18) about 8 million soldiers were killed. Most of the civilians killed were also men. In the Second World War (1939-45) about 60 million people were either killed or maimed for life, most of these were men. In the Iraq-Iran war alone (1979-1988) 82 thousand Iranian women and about hundred thousand Iraqi women were widowed. All in the space of ten years.

Another drain on the availability of men in society is imprisonment. In the USA, the most civilized society of modern times, no less than 1,300,000 people are convicted daily for one crime or another. A number of them – 97% of whom are men – are obliged to serve lengthy prison sentences.

The modern industrial system too is responsible for the lower proportion of men in society, death by accident having become a matter of daily routine in present times. There is no country in which accidents do not take place every day on the streets, in the factories and wherever sophisticated, heavy machinery is handled by human beings. In this modern industrial age, such accidents are so on the increase that a whole new discipline has come into being – safety engineering. According to data collected in 1967, in that year a total of 175000 people died as the result of accidents in fifty different countries. Most of these were men.

In spite of safety engineering, casualties from industrial accidents have increased. For instance, the number of air accidents in 1988 was higher than ever before. Similarly, experimentation in arsenals continue to kill people in all industrialized countries. But the death toll is never made public. Here again, it is men who have the highest casualty rate.

For reasons of this nature, women continue to outnumber men. This difference persists in even the most developed societies, e.g. in America. According to data collected in 1967, there were nearly 71,00,000 more women than men. This means that even if every single man in America got married, 71,00,000 women would be left without husbands.

We give below the data of several western countries to show the ratio of men to women. (Figures taken from the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1984)

Country	Male	Female
Austria	47.7%	52.93%
Burma	48.81	51.19
Germany	48.02	51.89
France	48.99	51.01
Italy	48.89	51.01
Poland	48.61	51.39
Spain	48.94	51.06
Switzerland	48.67	51.33
Soviet Union	46.59	53.03
United States	48.58	51.42

THE WILLINGNESS OF WOMEN

The presence of greater numbers of woman in a society is not the only prerequisite for polygamy. It is, in addition, compulsory that the women who are the object of the man's choice should be willing to enter into the married state. This willingness on the woman's part is a must before a marriage can be lawful in Islam. It is unlawful to marry a woman by force. There is no example in the history of Islam where a man has been allowed to force a woman into marriage.

The Prophet's own view that "an unmarried girl should not be married until her permission has been taken" had been recorded by both Bukhari and Muslim. Abdullah ibn Abbas, one of the Prophet's Companions and a commentator on the Qur'an, narrates the story of a girl who came to the Prophet complaining that her father had married her off against her wishes. The Prophet gave her the choice of either remaining within the bonds of wedlock or of freeing herself from them. (Abu Dawood).

Another such incident narrated by Abdullah ibn Abbas concerns a woman called Bareera and her husband, Mughees, who was a black slave. Abdullah ibn Abbas tells the story as if it were all happening before his very eyes. "Mughees is following Bareera through the paths of Medina. He is crying and his tears are running down his beard. Seeing him, the Prophet said to me, 'O Abbas, are you not surprised at Mughees' love for Bareera and Bareera's hate for Mughees?' Then the Prophet said to Bareera, 'I wish you would take him back.' Bareera said to the Prophet, 'Is that a command?' The Prophet replied, 'No, it is only a recommendation.' Then Bareera said, 'I don't need your recommendation.' But if it had been a command, she would have obeyed the Prophet.

There was an interesting case of polygamy which took place during the Caliphate of Umar Farooq. A certain widow, Umm Iban bint Utbah had four suitors for marriage. All four – Umar bin Al-Khattab, Ali ibn abi Talib, Zubayr and Talha – were already married. Umm Iban accepted the proposal of marriage

made by Talha and, of course, refused the other three, whereupon she was married to Talha.

This happened in Medina, the capital of the Islamic State. Among the rejected suitors was the reigning Caliph. But no one expressed even surprise or dismay; the reason being that in Islam, a woman is completely free to make her own decisions. This is a 'right that no one can take away from her – not even the ruler of the day.

These incidents show that the Islamic commandments giving permission to marry up to four women does not mean having the right to seize four women and shut them up inside one's home. Marriage is a matter of mutual consent. Only that woman can be made a second or a third wife who is willing to be so. And when this matter rests wholly on the willingness of the woman, there is no cause for objection.

The present age gives great importance to freedom of choice. This value is fully supported by Islamic law. On the other hand, the upholders of "feminism" want to turn freedom of choice into restriction of choice.

THE SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM RATHER THAN A COMMANDMENT

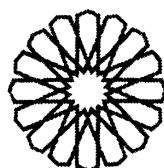
The above discussion makes it clear that the difference in number of men and women is a permanent problem existing in both war and peace. Now the question arises as to how to solve this problem. What should those women do to satisfy their natural urges? When they have failed to find a husband in a monogamous society? And how are they to secure an honourable life in that society?

One way – hallowed in Indian tradition – is for widows to burn themselves to death, so that neither they nor their problems survive. The alternative is to allow themselves to be turned out of their homes on to the streets. The state of Hindu society resulting from adherence to this principle can be judged from a detailed report published in *India Today* (November 15, 1987), entitled Widows: Wrecks of Humanity.

Now there is no need to discuss this further, because it is inconceivable that in present times any sensible person would advocate this as a solution.

The other possible 'solution' to be found in the 'civilized' society of the west is the conversion of unwillingness to become a second wife into willingness to become a mistress, often of more than one man.

During the Second World War in which several western countries such as Germany, France, Britain, etc. took part, a large number of men were killed. As a result, women far outnumbered men at the end of the hostilities. Permissiveness then became the order of the day, to the extent that boards with such inscriptions as 'Wanted: A Guest for the Evening' could be seen outside the homes of husbandless women. This state of affairs persisted in western countries in various forms, even long after the war, and "is now largely prevalent because of industrial and mechanical accidents."



Unity in Islam

When an individual places his trust in God, his trust is with the Almighty. This brings to him the conviction that he has secured the support of the supreme Being, the possessor of all powers on earth and in the heavens. This is a feeling which boosts his courage and confidence to the greatest possible extent. All other powers appear meaningless to him, while he himself becomes a tower of strength that no one can conquer.

The history of Islam is a living proof of this reality. Before the emergence of Islam, when Abraha, the ruler of Yemen, attacked Mecca with a dozen elephants, the Arabs became so frightened at this onslaught that they left their city and fled to the mountains. Yet, it was those same Arabs who, once equipped with the wealth of Islam, and supported by Iman, braved an encounter with the hundreds of elephants comprising the Persian army in the field of Qadsiya during the caliphate of Umar Farooq. Setting their very lives at risk, they hacked at the elephants trunks with their swords, forcing them to flee in retreat. The feats achieved by the Arabs of old, armed with the power of Iman and Islam, have been openly acknowledged by non-Muslim historians. Here are two quotations to this effect:

The army of the Faithful was borne forward by an enthusiasm which the half-hearted warriors opposite were unable to withstand.

(Muir, pp. 225-26)

The first companions of Mahomet advanced to battle with a fearless confidence; there is no danger where there is no chance; they were ordained to perish in their beds; or they were safe and invulnerable amidst the darts of the enemy.

(Gre V.P. 361)

However, only by fulfilling certain conditions will a group be entitled to the succour of God.

The first of these conditions is that each member of this group should possess true, living faith, have absolute trust in God, love and fear God alone, and strictly obey God, whether or not it be in accordance with his own will.

They should be truly Islamic in character, possessing the attributes of truth, honesty, justice and constancy in the fulfillment of promises. They must, in short, be men of principle, and not men guided by their own selfish interests.

They should be people who are moved to action for the sake of the hereafter, and not for the sake of the world, who regard this world as a place of trial and the hereafter as the real place where man's success and failure will be decided.

Members of this group must have complete unity and accord, remaining united in spite of differences and complaints.

As we all know, the Muslims belonging to the first phase of Islam achieved the greatest of success ever recorded in human history. However, they became the achievers of this most extraordinary success because of their living faith which enabled them to fight for God's cause in ranks, as if they were a solid cemented edifice (61:5).

Here I would like to remind you how this unity can be brought about – by tolerating the differences. Every man's likings, aptitudes and ways of thinking are different. It is therefore but natural to have differences among human beings. This is why social cohesion can emerge only when people demonstrate their ability and willingness to tolerate the differences. It is only by staying together in spite of differences that we can have unity.

I should now like to narrate only two of the inspiring incidents from Islamic history which serve as an example for us.

The battle between the Muslims and the Sassanid empire of Persia occurred during the caliphate of Umar Faruq. The final decisive encounter took place in the field of Qadsiya under Saad ibn Waqqas, the commander in-chief of the Muslim army. During the encounter, Saad was seated on top of an ancient building in the field, with the Muslim army in front of him and the Persian army further ahead.

When the battle began, Saad did not take part in it, but commanded it from his perch on top of this building. Continually inspecting the battlefield, he would write his commands on a slip of paper and drop it to a horseman on the ground, who in turn would gallop off to communicate the message to the commander on the spot.

After the victory a short poem became popular in the ranks of the Muslim army. Two of its couplets reads: 'I fought and fought until God granted victory, while Saad clung to the gates of Qadsiya. We returned (from the field of battle) to find many women widowed. Yet none of Saad's wives were widowed.'

Now what is remarkable about this is the fact that, in spite of the grudge they bore Saad every soldier of the Muslim army continued to fight fearlessly. No one broke the ranks. No one showed any signs of weakness. No human complaint could come in the way of their unity.

It is this spirit of remaining united in spite of differences that led Muslims of the past to success, and it is this same spirit which will lead them to success today.

Khalid ibn Walid was appointed commander-in-chief of the Muslim army by Abu Bakr Siddiqi, the first Caliph. Khalid ibn Walid was very popular in the army because of his successive victories, but on Umar Faruq becoming the second Caliph, he was relieved of his post and demoted to the rank of an ordinary soldier. When the army learned of his dismissal, many of the men gathered in his tent to urge him to

disobey the Caliph by refusing to accept his orders. 'We shall all be with you,' they said. In other words, they encouraged him to stage a coup. But Khalid ibn Walid's answer left the men of the army speechless, he said:

I do not bear any grudge against Umar, because I fight not for Umar, but for the Lord of Umar.

It is this spirit which made the Muslims of the past so powerful that Margolioth, an Orientalist, called them a "nation of heroes."

All the conflict and confrontations in this world result from complaints from human beings, but when man's action is wholly for God, complaints from human being become irrelevant. In spite of grudges voiced against him, he continues to serve the cause of Islam for the pleasure of God until, with divine succour, he reaches his ultimate goal. The greatest need of the hour is the inculcation of this divine spirit.